

19 SEP 1972

STATINTL

Tom Braden

Accusations Swirl Around CIA

THE Central Intelligence Agency is under fire again, this time accused of engaging in the heroin traffic. Despite our professed dedication to fact, we Americans are not immune to mythology. Where the CIA is concerned, we swallow almost anything.

For example, large numbers of Americans still believe the CIA encompassed the death of John Kennedy. The accusation used to make Robert Kennedy almost physically ill, but he was never able to scotch it, and you can still hear it whispered by those whose minds run to things that go "woosh! in the night."

The myth that the CIA is responsible for the vast quantities of heroin which enter this country probably has a similar goblinlike origin. When tragedy hits us we search for a culprit. Since World War II, the CIA has been at hand.

Unlike the death-of-Kennedy myth, to which no author or scholar ever gave credence, the heroin myth has now found respectable support. In a new book, "The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia," a young Yale student and antiwar activist named Alfred W. McCoy suggests that the

heroin tragedy in the nation is the fault of the CIA.

"AMERICAN diplomats and secret agents have been involved in the narcotics traffic at three levels," he writes. "(1) Coincidental complicity by allying with groups actively engaged in the drug traffic; (2) abetting the traffic by covering up for known heroin traffickers; (3) active engagement in the traffic of opium and heroin. It is ironic," he adds, "that America's heroin plague is of its own making."

If I may adopt Mr. McCoy's style for a moment, I should like to be permitted the following comment: Some Americans who want to change the policy in Vietnam endanger their effort on three levels: (1) They attribute evil to those who are carrying out the policy. (2) As evidence of the evil, they offer the policy. To say the CIA moved certain farmers to get them off the battlefield and that the farmers were forced to raise opium in order to eat is evidence that the CIA, like the American Army, is engaged in the war. But that's all it is. Nor is it good enough to accuse an agency of the U.S. government with importing her-

oin by evidence such as "Chinese merchants report" or "according to several sources." (3) They thus contribute to the making of a dangerous myth.

In dismissing Mr. McCoy's charges it is important to admit guilt by association. Opium has always been a product of Southeast Asia. The presence of U.S. troops has increased its value. Therefore it is highly likely that the CIA, as well as the American Army, has from time to time gained information or given support to individuals or groups who were drug traffickers. Moreover, there are times when dealing with drug traffickers may be excusable. If the man knows where the enemy is hiding, you don't refuse to learn from him because you know he beats his children.

It is also probably true that individuals employed by the CIA have been guilty of transporting heroin, just as soldiers in the U.S. Army have been guilty. Would Mr. McCoy therefore conclude that the U.S. Army is actively engaged in the transport of opium and heroin?

THE FACT is that CIA Director Richard Helms will fire anybody in the agency

who is caught trafficking in drugs, and that the use of drugs by agency personnel is also cause for immediate dismissal. CIA's policy on drugs is far more severe than that of the Army. Moreover, Helms and the agency are deeply engaged in an effort to spot the sources of heroin and identify the traffickers.

But saying this will probably not satisfy the mythmakers. Try citing the Warren commission to the next man you meet in a bar who tells you about the CIA and John Kennedy. "Oh," he will smile, knowingly, "the Warren Commission. That's the cover story."

© 1972, Los Angeles Times

STATINTL

MORI/CDE